

## A FRESH APPRAISAL OF THE HISTORICITY OF INDIAN EPICS

BY

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Let us imagine an archaeologist excavating well known sites of today 5000 years hence. New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras have perished by earthquakes or encroachment by the sea. Agra and Fatehpur Sikri are buried under ground. The archaeologist excavates all these sites. He discovers the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal at the site of Agra and the Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri, but finds no vestige of the British rule. He, therefore, declares that the literary evidence, according to which the British empire was established after the decline of the Mughal power, is wrong and that the British actually preceded the Mughals. This is not a mere fantasy, for a thing like this is unfortunately happening today when some of our archaeologists are asking us to throw all the well attested and varied literary evidence, not of centuries but of millenniums, overboard and to believe with them that the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* happened later than those of the *Mahābhārata*. There can be hardly any doubt that had Aśoka not inscribed his edicts in the far-flung parts of his empire, our archaeologists would have long ago declared that the literary evidence which credits Aśoka with a big empire is untrustworthy. Similarly if it was an Indian writer and not the foreigner Megasthenes who had said that the city of Pāṭaliputra had 570 towers and 64 gates and a population of 4,00,000 and that the palace of Candragupta surpassed in beauty the palace of Susa and Ekbatana, our archaeologists would have dismissed the statement as a figment of the imagination of the writer.

While positive archaeological evidence is of great value, negative evidence is sometimes very dangerous. Dr. R. S. Sharma, though pleading for archaeology-aided texts, whatever that may mean, utters a word of caution in one of his papers<sup>1</sup> when he says that the Indian archaeological scene has become the paradise for some who theorize on the basis of slender material. Yet the same scholar says : “ It is evident that without the advent of iron an area full of jungles and subject to heavy rainfall could not have been made fit for cultivation, habitation and consequently for large state formations, and archaeology shows that iron first began to be used in this area from 7th

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<sup>1</sup> Reconstruction of Ancient Indian History, *ABORI* 55, 1974.

century B.C. onwards." In the first place it is not correct to say that iron first began to be used in this area from the seventh century B. C. onwards. Iron objects have been found at Atranji Khera in practically all the layers suggesting that the use of iron was common throughout the P. G. Ware period which began around 1100 B.C. according to the noted archaeologists B. B. Lal and R. C. Gaur. Secondly, Sharma forgets two very important things. People in ancient times, instead of using iron or for that matter any other metal, resorted to another method for making an area full of jungles fit for cultivation and habitation. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it is clearly said that king Māthava made the region of Videha habitable by causing it to be burnt by Agni Vaiśvānara. In the first book of the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are said to have set on fire the Khāṇḍava forest which kept on burning for fifteen days before it became a fit site for the city of Indraprastha. Secondly, it should be remembered that implements and weapons of bronze are much harder than those of soft iron or steel, and if the Egyptians could cut granite for their pyramids and stone columns with the copper or bronze tools it is difficult to understand why tools of the same material could not be used in the Gangetic valley for cutting trees.

The three noted battles of the period of Indian history preceding Buddha which have been described at some length in ancient Indian literature, are the battle of Sudās against a confederacy of ten kings, the battle of Pāṇḍavas against Kauravas and the battle of Rāma against Rāvaṇa. Of these, the battle of Sudās against ten kings has been described in a battle song occurring in the seventh book of the *Ṛgveda* which appears to be a contemporary composition by Vasiṣṭha, the priest of Sudās. The battle of Pāṇḍavas against the Kauravas was also probably originally celebrated by a contemporary poet named Vyāsa, but since the epic *Mahābhārata* that contains a description of this battle has grown more than ten times the size of the original poem, it is a wellnigh impossible task to determine the contents of the work as it was when first composed. The battle of Rāma against Rāvaṇa is described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even the original portion of which was composed by the poet Vālmīki about a thousand years after the event on the basis of tales handed down by the sūtas. Since Sudās was fortunate not only in getting his own priest to celebrate his achievements but also in getting the song included in the sacred Vedic canon which saved it from interpolations, there is absolutely no controversy among historians about the genuineness of the event. So far as the other two battles are concerned, they have been the subjects of fierce controversy among scholars and even their genuineness is not universally accepted. We propose to discuss here all the aspects concerning the historicity of these two battles.



Ever since the beginning of the critical study of Indian literature in the nineteenth century, the date of the *Mahābhārata* and the historicity of the battle described in it have been the subjects of keen controversy. A fresh impetus was given to this by Dr. D. C. Sircar, who, on the fourteenth of September 1975, declared to the U.N.I. that the *Mahābhārata* was a myth on the following grounds :--

- 1 ) There is no reference to the Great War in the Vedic literature, nor does Kurukṣetra figure in this literature as a battle-field.
- 2 ) Divergent traditions prevail about its date.
- 3 ) The dates assigned to the event clash with the accepted time bracket of the Indus valley civilization and the arrival of the Aryans in India, the latter being sometime in the middle of the second millennium B.C.
- 4 ) The association of the southern and eastern kings with the war is inconceivable prior to the 4th century B.C., for Pāṇini who lived in the 5th century B.C. had no knowledge of the south and the east.
- 5 ) Finally, the strength of the fighting armies mentioned in the epic is unbelievable.

It is a pity that a scholar of the eminence of Dr. Sircar should have so summarily rejected a matter deserving much more serious thought. In the first place having said that it was not " a genuine historical event ", he contradicts himself by saying that it " must have been a petty family or tribal feud. " The description merely diminishes the event without altering the fact of it. Secondly, the arguments advanced by him fail to carry conviction. The only battle described in the whole range of Vedic literature is the battle in which Sudās fought against a confederacy of ten kings. The later Vedic literature with its pre-occupation with ritual and philosophy could not be expected to take any notice of battles or wars. Even the eight Purāṇas which give the list of kings of the Paurava dynasty, in which the heroes of the Bhārata war were born, do not mention the war. What is, however, noteworthy is the fact that the Vedic literature does mention several near ancestors and descendants of the heroes of the Bhārata war. The occurrence of the names of Śantanu, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Janamejaya in the Vedic literature only goes to prove that the story of the *Mahābhārata* could not be a mere figment of imagination. The question why the Pāṇḍavas and the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra are not mentioned in the Vedic literature can be answered by a counterquestion. Why is it that many kings whose names are indirectly known from the patronymics of their sons are not directly mentioned by the Vedic literature ? The Brāhmaṇa

literature, though repeatedly mentioning the name of Janamejaya, does not have to say anything about his father Parīkṣit. Similarly though Dhṛtarāṣṭra is mentioned in the *Kāthaka Samhitā* the name of his father Vicitravīrya occurs nowhere. In like manner though Bharata, son of Duṣṇanta, is mentioned in both the *Aitareya* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇas*, they take no notice of Duṣṇanta. The reason is obvious. The Vedic literature has generally taken notice only of those kings who were in some way actively associated with the ritual or philosophy with which it deals or of those who happened to patronize the poets, ritualists and philosophers who composed it. The non-mention of Pāṇḍavas, while some of their ancestors and descendants are mentioned, is therefore by no means surprising. As for the non-mention of Kurukṣetra as a battlefield, it is hardly necessary to point out that those not interested in wars and battles cannot be expected to be interested in describing any places as venues of battles.

The second reason of Sircar for declaring the Mahābhārata war a myth is equally unconvincing. Does the divergence in the dates assigned to king Kaniṣka or the Sātavāhanas prove that the Kuṣāṇa king was not a historical person or the famous dynasty which ruled over the Deccan for many centuries was just mythical? As a matter of fact, as far as the Purāṇas are concerned, there is hardly any divergence. They are practically unanimous in holding that the Bhārata war occurred 34 generations before the accession of Candragupta Maurya. The knowledge of an exact number of generations preceding an event which is unanimously regarded to have happened around 320 B.C. surely enables us to say that according to the Purāṇic evidence the Bhārata war must have occurred somewhere between 1150 and 850 B.C.

Sircar's argument that the dates assigned to the event clash with the accepted time bracket of the Indus valley civilization and the arrival of the Aryans in India, the latter being some time in the second millennium B.C., is really amazing. How can he say that the time bracket of the second millennium B.C. is the accepted date for the arrival of Aryans in India? Since the time Max Müller tentatively fixed 1500 B.C. as the date of the arrival of Aryans in India it has been challenged and repudiated by a number of other scholars, the most prominent being Winternitz who gave sound arguments to prove that the arrival of the Aryans in India could not have been later than the latter half of the 3rd millennium B.C. The Aryan civilization must have flourished side by side with the Indus valley civilization for long centuries and the theory that the Harappan civilization was destroyed by the Aryans is no longer seriously accepted by any scholar.

While advancing the last two arguments Sircar seems to have forgotten that believing in the historicity of the Bhārata war does not mean believing in



all that the present *Mahābhārata* contains. It is an undisputed fact that the present *Mahābhārata* is the result of centuries of additions and interpolations into the original work and therefore it would be unreasonable to say that it should be either wholly accepted or wholly rejected. So far as Sircar's argument No. 4 is concerned, in the first place it is not correct to state that Pāṇini was ignorant of the south and the east, for we actually find in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* references to Aśmaka (IV. 1. 173) situated on the Godāvarī in the south and Sūramasa (IV. 1. 170) which was the region watered by the river Suramā in Assam. Even the earlier *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* has mentioned the Āndhras of the south and the Puṇḍras of the east. Secondly, we can insist on the reliability of the names of only those participants of the Bhārata war whose role in the story is significant and indispensable such as Karna of Anṅa, Śalya of Madra, Śakuni of Gāndhāra and Jayadratha of Sindhu on the side of the Kauravas and Drupada of Pañcāla, Virāṭa of Matsya, Sahadeva of Magadha and Kṛṣṇa of Dvārakā on the side of the Pāṇḍavas. Bhagadatta of Prāgjyotiṣa certainly does not play any such important role in the story and so it is not necessary to insist on his historicity. The last argument of Sircar is really redundant, for no sober scholar of history has ever claimed that the strength of the armies as given in the *Mahābhārata* is anything other than a hyperbolic poetic fancy.

Thus, while it is true that the present *Mahābhārata* contains much that is the creation of the imagination of the poets who went on spinning the story and adding other material to it, the varied literary and even epigraphic evidence of centuries, nay millenniums, when viewed dispassionately, compels us to say that the main event on which the epic is based was historical. This evidence may be summed up as follows :

- 1 ) Several near ancestors and descendants of the heroes of the Bhārata war are mentioned in the Vedic literature which also mentions at least two of the participants of the Bhārata war viz. Kṛṣṇa Devakīputra and Śikhaṇḍin Yājñasena.
- 2 ) The genealogies of the Purāṇas mention the names of the chief heroes of the Bhārata war.
- 3 ) The grammarian Pāṇini mentions the names of two of the Pāṇḍavas viz. Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna, besides the name of Vāsudeva, i. e. Kṛṣṇa.
- 4 ) Kauṭilya attributes the destruction of Duryodhana to his usurpation of another's kingdom.
- 5 ) Patañjali mentions the names of Bhīma, Nakula and Sahadeva.

- 6 ) Six of the dramas of Bhāsa are based on the story of the *Mahābhārata*.
- 7 ) The Nasik cave inscription of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Pulomāvi dated 149 A.D. alludes to the valour of Arjuna and Bhīma.
- 8 ) The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang refers in the seventh century A.D. to an ancient tradition according to which a war had taken place in the region of Thanesar in remote times which was so terrible that the entire area was covered with bones which were still visible to him.

This literary and epigraphic evidence has luckily been confirmed by archaeology. According to B. B. Lal, there is some archaeological evidence of a circumstantial kind which suggests that in all likelihood there was a basis for the story of the Mahābhārata war. He has tried to correlate this evidence with the traditional account found in the great epic and the Purāṇas. According to him, there are three grounds on which the archaeological evidence supports the traditional account :

- 1 ) Most of the sites connected with the main story of the *Mahābhārata* have yielded from their lowest levels the material items of a culture designated by archaeologists as the painted grey ware culture since it is characterized by a particular type of pottery which is grey in colour and which is painted. The date of the painted grey ware culture is regarded as ranging between 1100 and 500 B.C. The fact that all these sites which are associated with the *Mahābhārata* story are linked with a common culture pertaining to a date range assigned to that story, supports its historicity.
- 2 ) There is a clear evidence of a heavy flood in the Gaṅgā which destroyed the settlement of the painted grey ware people at Hastināpura and compelled them to desert the site. This lends support to the statement of the Purāṇas according to which Nicakṣu, seventh in descent from Arjuna Pāṇḍava, the hero of the *Mahābhārata*, had to abandon Hastināpura when it was destroyed by heavy floods.
- 3 ) The painted grey ware pots have also been found at Kauśāmbī, an ancient town 50 km. from Allahabad, and these can be related with the last stages of the painted grey ware of Hastināpura. It is thus possible that the Purāṇic tradition, according to which Nicakṣu settled in Kauśāmbī after abandoning Hastināpura, is correct.



Thus a strong literary tradition supported by archaeological evidence leaves no doubt about the genuineness of the main story of the *Mahābhārata*.

We now turn to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Since it was composed by a poet who lived about a thousand years after the hero whose deeds he celebrated, the mythical element even in the original parts of this epic is greater than in the *Mahābhārata* and is much more pronounced in the first and last books which were added later. Great ṛṣis like Bharadvāja, Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva, Viśvāmitra and Paraśurāma who lived long before the hero of the epic have been made his contemporaries, and some of the non-Aryan tribes with whom he came into contact or conflict have been turned into monkeys and demons.

Notwithstanding the mythical element that has entered into the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there can be no doubt that the main story of this epic is also historical, since a number of literary works of great antiquity and even epigraphical records lend direct support to this story. This evidence may be summed up as follows :

- 1 ) Several ancestors and descendants of Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, are mentioned in the Vedic literature. The ancestors of Rāma whose names occur in the Vedic literature are Ikṣvāku, Kuvalayāśva, Māndhātṛ, Purukutsa, Trasadasyu, Anaraṇya, Vasumanas, Tryaruṇa, Hariścandra, Rohita, Bhagīratha, Amba-riṣa and Sindhudvīpa. The only descendant of Rāma whose name occurs in works belonging to the Vedic literature viz. the *Praśna Upaniṣad* and the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* is Hiraṇya-nābha who is expressly called Kausalya, king of Kosala.
- 2 ) The name of Rāma occurs in a hymn of the *Ṛgveda* itself along with those of three other kings Duṣṣīma, Vena and Pṛthavana ( i. e. Pṛthu ). The fact that he is called asura ( i. e. lord or mighty, a word implying the highest honour in the *Ṛgveda* where all the greatest of gods receive this epithet ) shows that he was regarded as a celebrated king even at the time of the composition of this hymn. Since the Indian literature knows of no famous king of ancient India bearing the name Rāma other than the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this *Ṛgvedic* king can be identified only with the king of Kosala of the same name.
- 3 ) The genealogies of the Purāṇas mention the name of Rāma in the Ikṣvāku genealogy and give the main events of his life.
- 4 ) The third book of the *Mahābhārata* gives the story of Rāma in its *Rāmopākhyāna*.

- 5 ) Kauṭilya alludes to the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* when he says that Rāvaṇa perished because he refused to restore another's wife to him.
- 6 ) Patañjali makes mention of a temple containing images of Kubera, Rāma and Keśava. Some scholars identify this Rāma with Balarāma, brother of Kṛṣṇa. But in temples where Kṛṣṇa is adored along with some member or members of his family we do not usually find the image of any other deity. Since the temple mentioned by Patañjali contained also the image of Dhanapati or Kubera, the probability is that all the three holy persons were unrelated to each other. That being so the Rāma of Patañjali can only be identified with the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* who seems to have been deified by that time.
- 7 ) Rāma is the hero of two of the plays of the ancient dramatist Bhāsa.
- 8 ) The Nasik cave inscription of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Pulomāvi mentions the name of Rāma along with those of other ancient heroes.

Recently Dr. D. C. Sircar has cast doubts on the historicity of the central story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in his lectures entitled *Problems of the Rāmāyaṇa* published in 1979 by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. Being in full agreement with him that *vāde vāde jāyate tattvabodhaḥ*, we propose to examine his arguments on the basis of which he rejects the historicity of Rāma.

Dr. Sircar is no doubt right when he talks about the lateness of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as compared to the period when Rāma is believed to have lived. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is, as he himself observes, based on the ancient ballads handed down by the sūtas from generation to generation. These ballads were not really lost, but were incorporated along with others in the original Purāṇa out of which the present Purāṇas grew. The main story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is thus not the creation of Vālmiki's brain, though many of the details are clearly imaginary with a good deal of fanciful and mythical element.

What is most astounding is the fact Sircar puts in the mouth of Aśva-ghoṣa what he never said. The poet nowhere even implies that Cyavana made "an attempt to write the Rāmakathā" but it was "either defective or remained incomplete". He is talking only about the composition of "padya" in which Vālmiki excelled his ancestor Cyavana. If somebody says that Bāṇa composed a gadya kāvya which his ancestor Vālmiki could not, would it mean that Vālmiki also attempted to write *Harṣacarita*? In fact, Aśvaghoṣa



could not have attributed a Rāmakathā to Cyavana because he must have known that Cyavana lived long before Rāma. According to the unanimous testimony of the Purāṇas which is supported by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Cyavana was the son-in-law of Manu's son Śaryāti, brother of Ikṣvāku who lived about 70 generations before his descendant Rāma. It may further be added that Cyavana is mentioned as an ancient sage in several hymns addressed to Aśvins occurring in the oldest portions of the *Rgveda*. That he is the same Cyavana as mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the Purāṇas is proved by the fact that the Rgvedic hymns agree with these works in holding that the sage was freed from old age by the Aśvins. Rāma, on the other hand, is not mentioned at all, at least in the older nine books of the *Rgveda* though the names of several of his ancestors occur in these books. The *Rgveda*, thus also makes it clear that Cyavana lived far earlier than Rāma and thus could not have composed a Rāmakathā.

It is further strange that putting the cart before the horse Sircar first accepts the theory of Winternitz that Vālmīki flourished in the third century B.C. and then wonders at the fact that "the Rāmāyaṇa depicts the whole region lying between the Yamuna in the north and the Indian ocean in the south as covered by forests and speaks of only one aboriginal kingdom viz. Kiṣkindhā ... (whereas) in the third century B.C. during the reign of the Mauryas the Cola, Pāṇḍya, Kerala and Satiya states are known to have flourished in the far south". It is clear that if Vālmīki had flourished in the third century B.C. he was bound to be influenced by the geographical knowledge of his time. This proves beyond doubt that Jacobi was right in placing Vālmīki somewhere between 800 and 500 B.C.

Next Sircar takes up the question of the four *yugas*. He is again wrong in saying that the *yuga*-division was fabricated by the astronomers about the age of the Imperial Guptas. As a matter of fact, the *yuga*-division was known in the Vedic period and is clearly mentioned in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>2</sup> What the Purāṇic authors and astronomers did was that they integrated this *yuga*-division with the cosmological scheme of Manvantaras and Kalpas and thus what was originally a simple division of the ages of the earliest history of India passed into the realm of mythology.

Sircar rejects the genealogy of Ikṣvāku kings for two main reasons : (1) There is wide divergence between the genealogy found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the one hand and that found in the Purāṇas on the other. (2) This would place Vaivasvata Manu and Ikṣvāku about the middle of the third millennium B.C. which is now believed to be the age of the early phase of the

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<sup>2</sup> 33, 3

Harappan civilization. So far as the first reason is concerned it should be remembered that it is not the fault of the Purāṇas if some late and ignorant interpolator of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has given a fake pedigree of Rāma which does not agree with the Ikṣvāku genealogy of these works. The very fact that Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvamśa* follows the Purāṇic genealogy and not the one given in the *Rāmāyaṇa* proves that the pedigree of Rāma found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* was not yet incorporated in it when Kālidāsa lived and wrote. The late and spurious nature of this pedigree is thus proved beyond a shadow of doubt. So far as Sircar's second reason is concerned we have already pointed out that the Aryan civilization of India must have commenced in the period of the early phase of the Harappan civilization.

Sircar regards the hazards of Rāma's journey from Ayodhyā to Laṅkā as proving the mythical nature of his story. He quotes the plight of the nineteenth century pilgrims proceeding from Burdwan to Puri in support of his observation. True, it was wellnigh impossible for ordinary men and women to return alive after such a hazardous journey. But there have always been steel-framed men and women whose determination causes all hazards and perils to melt away. In the ninth century A.D. the great Śaṅkarācārya is known to have travelled from Kerala in the far south of India to Badrinath in the Himalayas. Impelled by their faith and strong determination men and women still go on the extremely hazardous pilgrimage to mount Kailāsa and the lake Mānasa-rovara. No doubt Rāma's party was exposed to the danger of attack from hostile Rākṣasas, but there were friendly peoples also who were willing to give all help to the party on learning that it belonged to the royal house of Ayodhyā.

The language hurdle pointed out by Sircar hardly comes in the way of the genuineness of the story. History is full of instances when persons speaking different languages have met and communicated to each other. Surely Alexander and Porus spoke different languages and yet they did communicate their ideas to each other. Moreover, it is not wholly impossible that the Vānara chiefs like Sugriva and Hanumat had picked up some knowledge of Aryan speech, for the first Aryan settlers of the Deccan consisting of Agastya and his followers had crossed the Vindhya long before Rāma. Nor is it at all amazing that the flourishing state of the Rākṣasa culture at Laṅkā did not influence the Vānaras and the other aboriginal peoples, for we know that the advanced material civilization of the Americans has not markedly influenced the Amerinds even after a pretty long contact between the two.

Sircar's objection against the aerial car of Rāvaṇa is no doubt valid. But it should be remembered that the word *vimāna* originally meant only a fast-going chariot and is used in this sense in the ancient *Vāyu-Purāṇa* in its



account of Bhagīratha who is said to have adorned the bank of the Gaṅgā with numerous *vimānas* ( chariots ) on which he and his followers came there.<sup>3</sup> The *vimāna* on which Rāvaṇa travelled must have been a chariot which was turned into an aerial car by the poet's fancy. No doubt the use of chariots implies the existence of some kinds of roads. Since the Rākṣasas of Laṅkā often raided south India and since they possessed a fairly advanced civilization they must have built some kinds of roads in this part of India to facilitate their movements.

Of late issues have also been raised regarding some other aspects of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. According to the noted archaeologist H. D. Sankalia, Laṅkā was situated in the Vindhya forests and hills. Since Dr. Sircar in his *Problems of the Rāmāyaṇa* has effectively answered most of the arguments advanced by Sankalia we shall confine ourselves only to the following two :

- 1 ) Dhur Gonds, Muṇḍas and other aboriginal tribes in the Vindhya forests and hills honour Rāvaṇa and regard him as their ancestor.
- 2 ) The poet of the *Rāmāyaṇa* had never seen south India and was unfamiliar with the life in south India as can be inferred from the fact that only cremation and that too of a typically Aryan or Vedic type is vividly described whereas it is definitely known that the prevalent custom of disposing of the dead in these parts was burial.

Unfortunately none of these arguments of Sankalia produce conviction. What is the proof that the claim made by the Dhur Gonds, Muṇḍas and other aboriginal tribes is based on truth? The Rajput clans of Sisodias, Rathors and Kacchawahas claim descent from Rāma, but the modern historians have disputed that claim. Even if we regard the claim of these tribes to be based on truth, where is the proof that they have been settled in the Vindhya region since the time of Rāma? We know that since very ancient times there have been migrations of tribes from one region to the other. If that were not so there could not have existed a Dravidian speech, Brahui, in Baluchistan today and there could not have been a Gujarat in the north-west of Pakistan besides the one in the west of India.

Sankalia's argument that the poet of the *Rāmāyaṇa* had never seen south India may be, and is probably, true, but that does not prove that the hero of the story of his epic also had not seen south India. There is nothing to stop a poet from choosing a person connected with regions unknown to him as the hero of his poem. The other point in this argument is more relevant.

<sup>3</sup> *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 88, 168.

4 [ *Annals*, BORI ]

We do expect a poet to know something about a region which happens to be connected with the hero of the story of his poem. Sankalia, however, is wrong when he says that only cremation is described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The poet was surely aware that burial was the method prevalent in south India as is clear from the statement put in the mouth of the dying Virādha in III, 3, 23-24 and his subsequent burial. If in the case of Jaṭāyu and Vālin it is different it only proves the hand of an interpolator.

Laṅkā may or may not have been identical with the modern Sri Lanka but what is clearly and repeatedly said in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the fact that Rāma dwelt on the bank of the river Godāvarī for a long time and that this Godāvarī was in the south. It would, therefore, be wholly unjustified to reject the tradition according to which the spot, where Rāma dwelt on the bank of the Godāvarī, was near Nasik, unless some evidence more ancient than the *Rāmāyaṇa*, proving its mistaken nature, comes to light.

Another noted archaeologist, B. B. Lal, makes the excavations at Ayodhyā the excuse for creating a new tradition according to which, contrary to the firm, well established and unanimous literary evidence of millenniums, Rāma was born later than the heroes of the Mahābhārata war. Now it is clear that the P.G.W. culture, if it is Indo-Aryan, represents not an early but a late phase of Vedic Aryan civilization. The fact that excavations in the lowest levels of the sites connected with the *Mahābhārata* story such as Hastināpura, Barnawa, Bairat, Indrapat, Panipat, Sonapat and Baghpat have revealed the remnants of this culture supports this contention. Hastināpura, Indraprastha and Virāṭanagara were the latest in the series of towns that arose during the Vedic period and were actually founded in the period when P.G.W. culture flourished. When they were deserted or destroyed no new towns arose on their ruins, with the result that the culture associated with the time when they were founded remained preserved. On the other hand, according to the unanimous testimony of the Purāṇas, which is confirmed by Vedic evidence, Kuśasthala, Vārāṇasī and Ayodhyā were the most ancient of the towns founded by Aryan kings.<sup>4</sup> These cities were several times destroyed and every time new ones arose with the same names on the sites of the old ones.

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\* Kuśasthala was the ancient name of Kānyakubja or Kannauj and meant the Dwelling of Kuśa, a king descended from Jahnu, famous in the Brāhmaṇas, who was the first Aryan king to settle on the bank of the Gaṅgā, which therefore came to be called Jāhnavī. Vārāṇasī was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kāśī, one of whose kings Pratardana, was one of the three royal authors of a R̥gvedic hymn (X. 179. 2) and, is expressly called Kāśīrāja in the *R̥gveda Anukramanī*, a work quite independent of the Purāṇas. The ancientness of Ayodhyā is proved by its mention in the *Atharvaveda*.



There can be no doubt that the earliest cities of these names have completely perished and what the excavations have yielded is the culture of very late cities of these names. If it is asked why no remnants of the culture of the time, when these cities were founded, have been discovered, we would answer by a counter-question : Why is it that no remnants of the Ṛgvedic culture have been found in the Punjab which was the first home of the Indo-Aryans according to the clear testimony of the *Ṛgveda* ? Obviously the Ṛgvedic Aryans were materially much less advanced than the Indus valley people and their houses and other things were made of perishable material which could not survive the onslaught of weather and other contingencies in the course of millenniums.

The most disappointing part of B. B. Lal's arguments is his futile attempt to marshal literary evidence in his favour. He refers to the famous debate held in the court of king Janaka according to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in which Bhuju Lāhyāyani cross-examined the sage Yājñavalkya by putting the question, *kva pārikṣitā abhavan* ? Since the Pārikṣitas lived after the Bhārata war and since Yājñavalkya, as the pupil of Vaiśampāyana who related the events of the Bhārata war to king Janamejaya, also flourished after the Bhārata war, this Janaka was clearly a king of the post-Bhārata war period. If he is identical with the father of Sītā, the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is proved to be later than that of the *Mahābhārata*. Now two things have to be borne in mind with regard to the incident mentioned in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The word *pārikṣitā* does not mean 'descendants of Parikṣit', but 'sons of Parikṣit', for all the four sons of Parikṣit II viz. Janamejaya, Ugrasena, Śrutasena and Bhīmasenā are said to have performed horse sacrifices and gone to heaven in consequence of this performance. Secondly, it should be remembered that Janaka was a family name and all kings of this dynasty called themselves Janaka. It is only the proper name of a particular king which can enable us to distinguish him from the other kings of this dynasty. The proper name of the father of Sītā was Śiradhvaja. The Purāṇas unfortunately do not give the names of the kings of this dynasty after the Bhārata war. We are, however, fortunate in knowing the name of the patron of Yājñavalkya from the *Mahābhārata* and indirectly from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* itself. Yājñavalkya was not only a pupil of Vaiśampāyana but also of Uddālaka Āruṇi. Uddālaka's son Śvetaketu, who was of almost the same age as Yājñavalkya, is said in the *Mahābhārata* to have visited the court of Janaka and the personal name of this Janaka, according to the epic ( III. 134.1 ), was Ugrasena. This name is indirectly confirmed by the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* III. 8.2 where Gārgī, while testing the knowledge of Yājñavalkya, compares her two questions to the arrows of

Ugraputra the Vaideha i.e. the Vaideha prince, son of Ugrasena. It is thus indubitably proved that the Janaka of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* was different from the father of Sītā.<sup>5</sup>

Before concluding this paper one more point raised by some scholars may be examined. The *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* mentions a certain Baka, descendant of Dalbha, as a contemporary of Bhagīratha Aikṣvāka, a noted ancestor of Rāma. A person of the family, who is called Vaka, is mentioned in the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā* as a contemporary of Dhṛtarāṣṭra Vaicitravīrya. By identifying the Vaka of the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā* with the Baka of the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*, these scholars would like to conclude that Bhagīratha was a contemporary of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and therefore flourished about the time of the Bhārata war and consequently Rāma came after the Bhārata war. In this connection it is important to remember that *b* and *v* are not interchangeable in Vedic Sanskrit as they are in classical Sanskrit and therefore the names Baka and Vaka have to be regarded as distinct as rightly done by Macdonell and Keith in their *Vedic Index*. Those, however, who insist on identifying the two, must tell us as to why the name of a noted king like Bhagīratha, if he was a contemporary of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, does not occur anywhere in the *Mahābhārata* or the Purāṇas among the contemporaries of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Was there a conspiracy to eliminate his name from the list of persons figuring as contemporaries of Dhṛtarāṣṭra?

In conclusion it may be said that there is no warrant to distort the main characters, events and locales of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. As far as its chronology is concerned, the safest guide is the genealogical account of the Purāṇas. According to it Rāma ruled 28 generations before the Bhārata war. If the Bhārata war took place at some date not far from 1000 B.C., Rāma must have ruled around 1500 B.C.

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<sup>5</sup> The attempt of Lal to identify Sītadhvaja, the father of Sītā, with the patron of Yājñavalkya on the basis of a verse occurring in Bhavabhūti's *Mahāvīracarita* is ridiculous. The statement of a poet who flourished as late as the eighth century A. D. has absolutely no validity specially when it is contradicted by much earlier evidence.